

The Structure of Motivation. A First Introduction

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Abstract. Motivation is defined as the passage from one psychological act to the following one. After distinguishing among the three levels of presentation, representation and feelings, the most relevant data concerning presentations and feelings are presented. Finally, acts are analysed into their components aspects and the latter's role in articulating motivations is presented.

Keywords: Motivation, act, ego, object, value, level of reality, Stein, Husserl

1. Introduction

Material things encounter each other and reciprocally influence each other. One material thing influences another material thing, modifying its state and its trajectory. If the thing that exerts influence does so too strongly, the influenced thing may even be destroyed; if the influence is too weak, it may have no discernible effect (which does not mean, however, that there is no effect). The interplay of action and reaction is only the most obvious and banal aspect of physical causality. Others and more sophisticated forms of interaction include the effects exerted by immaterial physical phenomena like fields (gravitational, magnetic, etc), whose lines of force determine the form of the interaction according to patterns of lesser energy expenditure or greater efficiency. Moreover, material things pass through different changes of state (liquids may become solid or gaseous, certain substances can explode, ferrous substances oxidize, ligneous substances burn, etc). All these transformations, and many others besides, which need not be listed here, are due to causal interactions. Numerous interactions are *external*, that is, they occur between two separate entities; others are *internal*, that is, they take place within a single entity. The changes due to the *ageing* of a material substance (for example, atomic decay, or loss of consistency by the inner structure) are perhaps the most striking cases of inner transformations of material substances.

An inquiry that sets out to compare the forms of causal interaction among different types of entities must add a further specification: the entities of the physical world subject to the forms of causality just mentioned are entities for which nothing matters: nothing is important for them; whatever happens, they are uninvolved. If all causal interactions operated only on entities of this kind, there would be nothing further to say. We know, however, that there are causal interactions which involve other types of entities – entities that are indeed interested in what happens to them. The world of causal interactions also encompasses animate entities. But the way in which these latter enter the picture of causal interactions introduces new aspects: besides interactions of an 'inanimate', so to speak, nature (which indubitably concerns *also* animate objects), the reference to animate agents brings the reality of new types of causal interaction to the surface. From this it follows that we must distinguish at least two families of causal interactions, which in their turn intersect in many different ways.

Before proceeding further, there is a further aspect to consider. This is the apparently obvious fact that, with respect to the world and our experience of it, disembodied minds do not exist. All the natural minds that we know are embedded in a body. However, given that analysis of body and mind seem to require different groups of ontological categories, the problem immediately arises of how to synthesize two so apparently different realities into a single organic whole. We

all know how intricate this problem is; and I certainly do not want to trivialize it with few schematic distinctions. There is however one aspect which warrants particular attention. I refer to the fact that biological entities and all entities which require a living being as their existential basis (the mind in our case but, with due caution, also social phenomena) introduce an aspect of 'vitality', or also of 'organicity'. Vital being and organic being are dimensions that originally characterize the level of biological entities, and only by extension can they be applied to other levels of reality, such as mental or social ones. Although psychological analysis of these two categories is postponed until later, for the time being we need at least a preliminary characterization of them.

Let us begin with the case of organic being. Here I shall propose a general characterization of 'organic' which is independent of its specific manifestations in concrete. I interpret organic as including the feature of 'non-fractionable'. More specifically: decomposition of an organic whole into parts may lose information. Alternatively: once we have obtained a breakdown into distinct parts of an organic whole, there is no way to reconstitute the original whole. Unlike mechanisms, which when they are 'broken' can often be mended, when organisms are 'dead', they cannot be revived.

It is possible to furnish a more analytical description of organicity which moves through three stages:

1. A does something and, by doing it, A produces B
2. Once constituted, B constraints – i.e. modifies – A

1 and 2 apply to an enormous variety of hierarchical phenomena. The step that leads to the case of organic phenomena is the next one:

3. Once constituted, B produces the As from which it is composed.

The final stage is the autopoietic component that distinguishes organic structures from other hierarchically organized dynamic structures. The autopoietic cycles (steps 1-3) may be, and usually are, embedded in other autopoietic cycles. In this regard, it is important to note that a higher-order autopoietic cycle may comprise as its parts both lower-order autopoietic cycles of a different order (that is, ones that in their turn comprise or do not comprise other autopoietic cycles) and parts that are not autopoietic cycles.

The elements that make up an autopoietic cycle are reciprocally entangled: if the elements are separated from the cycle (from below, so to speak), their disentanglement from the cycle destroys (or at least damages) the cycle itself. On the other hand, the opposite is not true: the higher structure (the cycle in itself) may 'decide' to change its elements and to substitute them with other elements or groups without suffering any damage. Indeed, the driving force behind these changes is usually the pursuit of greater efficiency.

By itself this property of substitutability among the elements of a cycle is independent of the cycle's autopoietic dimension (this also holds for many cycles based on 1 and 2 above, without 3). This concerns a fundamental chemical, rather than biological, property. The idea is that of the hypercycles of Eigen and Schuster (1979).

We have seen at least one of the structural dimensions of the concept of organic entity. Still to be discussed is the concept of vitality. In this regard I can be brief. If, as we have seen, organic entities are entangled hierarchical entities, and if the genesis of the structure depends on the

action of some prior elements, the energy required for those preliminary actions and for the following entangled iterations corresponds precisely to the desired characteristic of vitality.

If we set aside purely physical entities, the majority of the other entities that make up the furniture of the world have diverse ontological layers. That is to say, they exhibit ‘aspects’ that from an ontological point of view are categorically orthogonal. Organisms endowed with minds are of this kind, but so too are many social phenomena: houses have a material aspect (that of which they are made) and an enormously more composite social one (their functional structure, style, type). The same applies to works of art, which typically have a material basis (the canvas of a painting or the paper of a book) and an aesthetic aspect – this too enormously more composite (organization of the work, style, type, etc). The examples abound. Their systematic analysis requires a theory of the levels of reality, on which see Poli (2001) for a more thorough discussion.

For the time being we are only interested in the particular case of the relationship between mind and body, and in how the mind, though categorically different from the body, nevertheless inherits some structural properties – such as organicity and vitality – from levels of reality below it.

2. *The layer of reality of psychological being*

In analytical terms, I distinguish three principal components of the psyche, organized on two levels: the underlying level will be called the ‘level of presentation’, overlapping with which are the levels of representation and feelings (or emotional phenomena) (Fig. 1) (Poli 2006a,b). Here I shall merely provide a short description of presentations (this section), and of feelings, leaving representations (imagery, phantasy, reasoning, (reactualized) memory, etc) for another occasion.

Presentations form what is usually called stream of consciousness, specious present or moment now. They constitute the basic temporal structure of our mind. Representations include all higher-order cognitive acts (thinking, reasoning, planning, etc), while the component of the feelings includes all emotional acts.

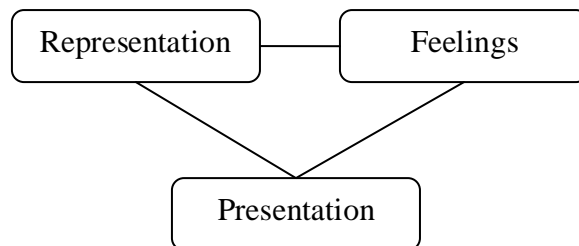


Figure 1. The main structure of the psyche

The specious present is the multiplicity of what is actually given to the mind, the basic temporal flow of intentionality.

However, the present is not only simultaneous perception; it is also *unification* of the given multiplicity. In short, the present “is that feature of the psychic change which is apprehended as unity and which is the object of a single mental act of apprehension” (Albertazzi 2001a, pp. 110-111).

According to Husserl, the analysis of intentional phenomena requires a number of different components, including both the act’s structure (a component sometimes called ‘latitudinal’ intentionality) and the ordering of the acts, i.e. the past-present-future rhythm of the succession

of acts (also called 'longitudinal' intentionality). The act's structure comprises (a) origin of the act from the so-called 'pure ego', (b) the phases of the intentional act, (c) the forms of self-organization of the act's correlate (through contrast, fusion, grouping, figure/background, pairing) and the time required by such self-organizations, (d) the modalization of the act (through attention or alertness, or their lack, and through emotional attitudes), (e) the modalization of the act's correlate (its profiling or saliencing). The ordering of acts comprises the many complications arising from series of acts, ranging from the sinking of past acts into memory to anticipation of the future ranging from void anticipations to projects.

A first question to be asked is whether there is any way to *prove* and eventually to *verify* Husserl's claims experimentally. The answer is unquestionably affirmative: see for instance Albertazzi's work for both ample reference to the relevant literature and further developments of the position. Here I limit myself to but one single aspect, the temporal duration of a single case of specious present. My questions are therefore: How long does the specious present last? And, how can we determine its length?

One possible way is to present two objects in succession and to measure the duration of the interval necessary for their perceptions not to interfere with each other. The idea is that if the two presentations are below the threshold, their objects mingle in the correlate of a single act of perception. In this case, research has found that the minimum duration required for perception to take place without interference is ca. 700 μ s (Albertazzi 2001a, pp. 111).

If two different visual presentations follow one another at a quicker pace, the resulting perception is composed of elements originating from both of the original presentations. Suppose that two groups of six different objects each are presented one after the other. What is seen is a group of six objects comprising some of the objects from the first sextet and some of those from the second sextet. This shows that a single act of apprehension requires a specific amount of time, and that the complexity of its correlate is constrained.

Summing up the experimental data so far available, the following are some of the basic features of presentations:

- Presentations last from 200 μ s to 3000 μ s ca. On average, they last approximately 700 μ s.
- The duration of presentations depends on a variety of factors, ranging from the subject's mood feelings (they are shorter when the subject is excited and longer when s/he is relaxed) to the cognitive state of the subject (attention shortens presentation), to the content of what is presented, etc.
- Presentations come with an inner organization, on various dimensions. Of these the most important are (a) the distinction between focus and periphery, (b) the presence of internal laws of organization, and (c) the elaboration of their content in subsequent stages. (a) entails that there are upper limits to the complexity of the correlate in the focus; (b) yields possibly most surprising results, namely the laws of temporal and spatial inversion (Benussi 1913); (c) states that presentations themselves have a temporal structure (Albertazzi 2003).
- Presentations come in a (temporal) series, often called stream of consciousness.

3. Emotional acts

Emotional or egological acts are structured in levels of depths, ranging from acts conveying more superficial information to those conveying more intimate information (Poli 2006a,b). Furthermore, all emotional acts are linked to values. Although the connection between emotions and values is

well known, it seems that only phenomenologists have been able to sketch in any detail the way in which it works.

Three different layers can be distinguished. The most external (superficial) layer concerns information about how we sense our body. *Feeling cold, warm, just ok* are some of the most typical cases. Let us call them *sensorial feelings*.

The next layer comprises information about our moods. *Feeling bored, excited, relaxed, angry, and exhausted* make up only a tiny section of the rich and highly articulated field of moods. Feelings pertaining to this second group are typically twofold: they have a more bodily-oriented side and a more psychologically-oriented one. By default, they merge, but they may diverge and their manifestation may follow different routes according to a variety of conditioning factors, from social to individual. Let us call this second group of feelings *mood feelings*.

The third and deepest-lying layer is our personal style, the way in which we react to what happens to us. Suppose that something hurts you. You may *resist* the pain, *tolerate* it, *combat* it, *accept* it, or even *enjoy* it. Let us denote this third group of feelings with the term *character*.

A character is defined by a number of different parameters (Hartmann 2003), each of which is a cline ranging from a maximum to a minimum. The first dimension varies from activity to passivity. By ‘activity’ is meant stance-taking or commitment; by ‘passivity’, indifference, inertia or apathy.

The second dimension centres on the opposition between a person’s strength or weakness. Strength and activity are not synonymous: also passivity may be strong. The stance-taking associated with activity may be strong or weak; and inertia may be strong in the sense of stubborn.

The third dimension ranges from the capacity to suffer to the incapacity to suffer. The positive valence assigned to the capacity to suffer is signalled by the patent negativity of the incapacity to suffer. The former consists of resistance against the adversities of life, the character’s tempering through suffering; the latter consists of inner fragility.

The fourth dimension is anticipation: a more or less broad vision of the future to which the person may accede. In this case, the opposition takes the common-sense form of the difference between a broad and narrow outlook on the future.

The fifth dimension is the ability to select goals and to find the means with which to achieve them. I call this ability ‘purposefulness’.

In a slightly different wording, and by way of a summary:

1. Openness/closure towards the environment and other agents (no agent can be either entirely closed or entirely open, the agent has a more or less porous boundary; openness means taking a stance or being committed; closure means indifference, inactivity or apathy).
2. Self-modification (capacity of the agent to modify its own settings; an agent may be open and have a very low capacity for self-modification, or vice versa; 1 and 2 are different dimensions).
3. Other-modification (capacity of the environment or other agents to modify the setting of the agent; having a character means that other-modification should be set low).
4. Horizon (having broad or narrow views; the windowing of the agent’s future; it can be more or less wide).

5. Purposiveness (ability to set oneself purposes, to choose goals and find the means to achieve them).

A character is defined by the position it assumes along each of these dimensions. Each dimension consists of a continuum ranging from an extreme of value to an extreme of disvalue. Furthermore, each dimension also has points of breakdown where values change directly into disvalues (different from disvalues as complements). Consider the capacity to suffer. It is true that suffering tempers the character, so that the person is able to achieve higher thresholds of value. However, if the suffering exceeds the ability to withstand it, the person is destroyed and the suffering changes directly into disvalue. Note that the various dimensions are different but not orthogonal: as a matter of fact a modification in one dimension may reverberate on the other dimensions.

Furthermore, behind the structure just outlined there lies the choice of certain values that orient the person from within. These choices concern, for instance, the options between altruism and egoism or between individualism and solidarism. In human beings, adoption of these orienting values is the result of the first phases of the educational process.

The final aspect to mention is that the whole field of emotional acts is where our vital force is produced and consumed. Negative feelings consume vital energy, while positive ones produce vital energy (Stein 2000). This is the place where the link is explicit between psychological acts and causation.

4. Acts and their structure

Egological and non-egological acts are both intentional acts. Three major problems characterize the theory of psychological acts, namely the problems of (1) the structure of the act, (2) the interaction among different contemporaneous acts, and (3) the production of an act on the basis of previous acts. The latter is precisely the problem to which we are heading, namely the problem of motivation. In order to understand its many subtleties, I have to first say a few words on the structure of the act, while entry (2) – the problem of the interactions among different contemporaneous acts – will be left for another paper.

Every act is a three-fold entity: it has a source, a target, and a body. The ego is the source of the act, the object is its target, and what connects the ego with the object is the body of the act (Figure 2).

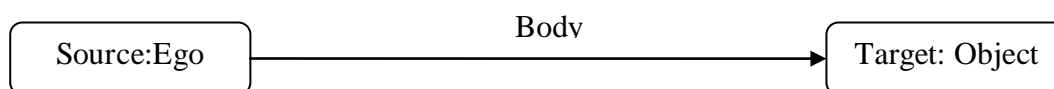


Figure 2. The basic structure of an intentional act

The object or correlate of the act is sometimes termed ‘internal accusative’. The body and the target of acts are internally linked to one another: for every seeing there is something that is seen, for every thinking there is something that is thought, for every feeling there is something that is felt, etc. The act’s correlates are internal, not external, objects.

5. On the structure of the ego

Although figure 2 above is correct, it depicts only a minimal part of the real structure of an act. A more satisfactory representation should for instance distinguish the different elements of the ego. At least three components (or substructures) of the ego can accordingly be distinguished: ‘pure ego’,

‘individual ego’, and ‘self’.

The pure ego is an entirely functional component which in itself does not possess any independent properties. The only feature characterizing the pure ego is that of being the point of origin of intentional acts. In this sense the pure ego is always present – by definition – in every intentional act.

Unlike the pure ego, the individual ego is not exclusively functional. In particular, the individual ego has two constitutive properties, what I call the location and the volume of the ego.

Owing to the first property, the individual ego has a place in which it lives. I distinguish two canonical types of place: the residence and the domicile of the individual ego. The residence of the individual ego is the place where the ego *properly lives*. The individual ego may live in other places as well (outside itself, i.e. outside its proper place). I shall call these other places in which the individual self can live ‘domiciles’. The individual ego can also live domiciled for the entirety of its life. In this case, however, it is an ego that lives permanently outside itself; an ego that is structurally inauthentic.

The canonical places in which the individual ego lives are the emotions: an area of the psyche which, as we have seen, has a hierarchical structure organized by levels of depth, in the sense that some emotions are more superficial and others are deeper-lying. The individual ego usually lives at one of the levels that characterize the realm of the emotions. The deeper the level in which the individual ego authentically lives (where it has its residence), the broader the range of values to which it can accede.

It may be that there are some egos that authentically live at the level of the most superficial emotions. In this case we have the authentically superficial ego.

I call a person ‘authentic’ whose ego lives in its proper place. I instead call ‘inauthentic’ a person whose ego mainly lives elsewhere, in a place different from its proper one.

Note that it is not true that the proper place of every ego is the deepest level of the emotional act. For some it is not thus. This also means that there are at least two forms of inauthenticity: that of egos with a deep-lying proper place and which live ‘above’ it (live superficially in comparison to the depth of their proper place); and that of egos whose proper place is superficial and which live ‘below’ it (live with depth with respect to the superficiality of their proper place). Needless to say, the depth of this latter form of inauthenticity is a bogus depth.

Another case of inauthenticity must now be added to the two described thus far. This is the case of the ego whose proper place lies ‘midway’ and which lives unstably somewhat above and somewhat below its proper place. Perhaps, on balance, it is the case which characterizes we inhabitants of the advanced industrial societies better than all the others.

The second property of the individual ego is its volume. ‘Volume’ denotes (1) the fact that the individual ego has greater or lesser ‘extension’; (2) that some parts of the ego are more superficial, while others are deeper, reaching the most intimate core of the ego, and (3) that like all volumes the ego may also be ‘occupied’, ‘filled’ with some other substance.

Because of (1), the self can be extended or constricted, either open to encounter or self-enclosed; (2) indicates that even the most superficial ego has the permanent availability of a depth, just as it is possible that even the deepest-lying ego lives at the surface of its depth; finally (3) indicates that the

space of the ego may be occupied by other stuff, and in different ways. Sensible pain and pleasure, for instance, capture the ego, “sensory pain and sensory pleasure come over the ego on its periphery on down. They seize possession of it so exclusively that nothing else has room besides”. In this regard, Stein notes that, even when the ego is totally occupied by sensible pain or pleasure, these nevertheless “don’t get into its depths and they never attach to the ego itself” (Stein 2000, 163). If Stein is right, this means that the “volume” of the ego has a stratified composition, and that occupation of the outermost levels does not implicate occupation of the innermost ones. If anything, when the external levels are totally occupied, the internal ones are smothered: they are unable to make themselves felt; they increasingly close in upon themselves and shrink. Another and very different way to occupy the volume of the self is when moods fill the entire ego, at both its superficial and deeper-lying levels. Anguish or relief are of this nature. The difference between the two cases seems to reside in their point of departure: pain starts from the surface, and from the surface penetrates into the ego, whilst anguish or relief start from within the ego and then expand until they entirely occupy it.

Finally, the self is the public side of the ego, the one that articulates itself in the perception that the subject possesses of the roles that it embodies. The self has mainly to do with forms of socialization (mostly primary, but not only these), but I shall not deal with this further here.

Decomposition of the ego into the above three components makes it possible to ‘filter’ the intentional act in different ways according to the source or sources concerned (Figure 3).

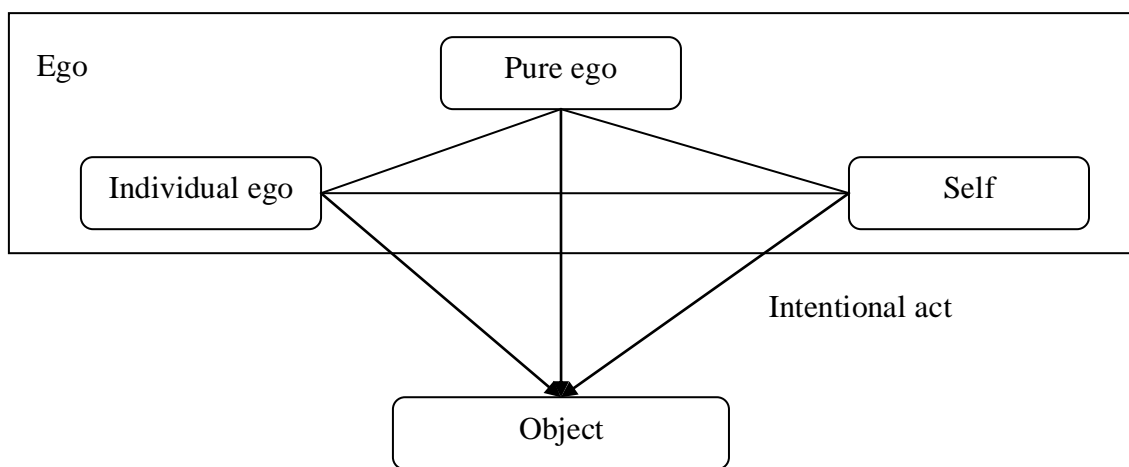


Figure 3. A more realistic structure of the intentional act

In the reality of a completed intentional act, the pure ego, the individual ego, and the self are all involved, and each makes its contribution. On the other hand, the specific contribution of each of them can be analysed more easily by separately considering the various *triangles* that derive from it:

- Pure ego—individual ego—object
- Pure ego—self— object
- Individual ego—self— object.

The composition of each *triangle* depends in its turn on the composition of the three sides of the ego, that is, of the triangle: Pure ego—individual ego—self.

6. *The structure of motivation*

Motivation was defined earlier as passage from act to act. Figure 4 provides a graphical representation of the idea.

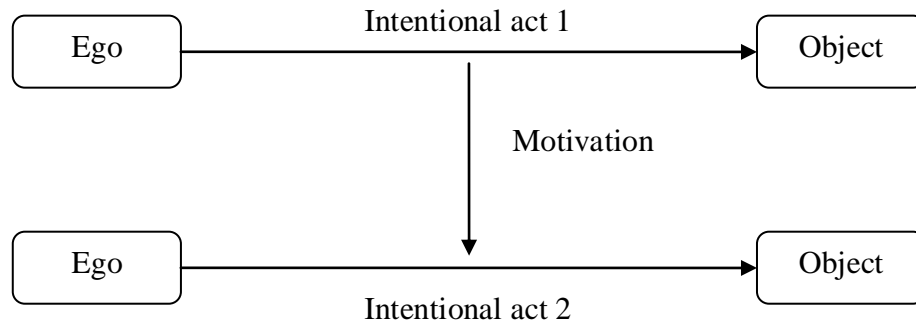


Figure 4. Motivation

Given the decomposition of the ego into the three aspects of pure ego, empirical ego and self, we can redraw Figure 4 to account for the complexity of the ego, as shown in Figure 5.

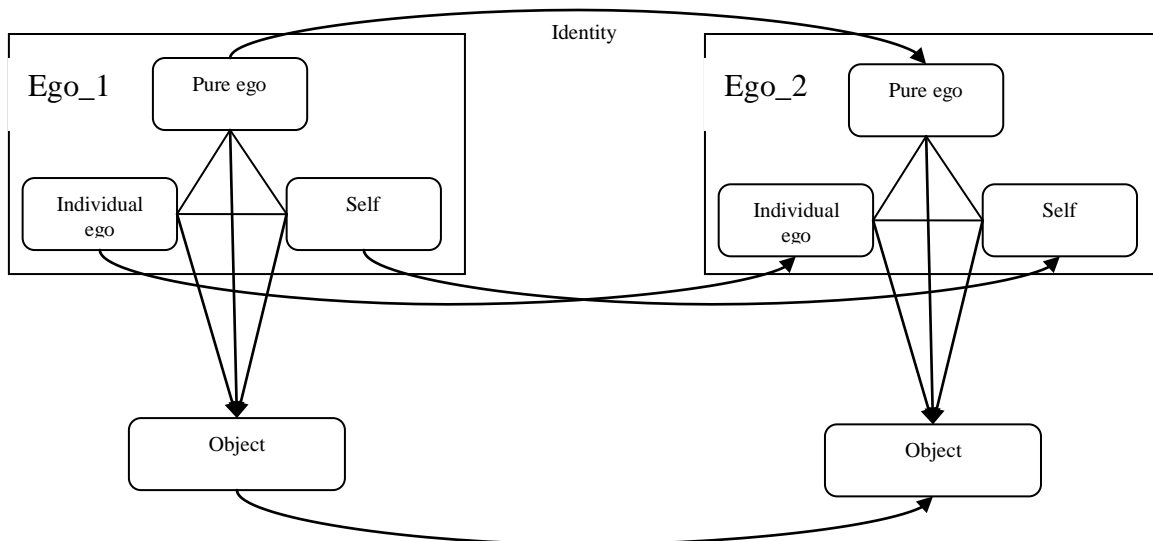


Figure 5. The decomposition of motivation

The link between the two pure egos is the link of identity, for obvious reasons. On the other hand, there is no reason to think that links between all the other components of Figure 5 are identity links. This almost geometrical way of analysing the internal structure of intentional acts and motivations as links between acts (and their components) may help shed light on these very complex topics.

Leaving geometric considerations aside, let us return to the crux of our problem. What exactly is meant by saying that motivation is the passage from one act to the following one? The idea is that the ego performs a certain act because – on the basis of the fact that – another act has been performed. When I see a thing, I see only one side of it, I circle around it to see the other sides as well: belief in a certain state of affairs may motivate belief in another state of affairs connected with

it; espousing a value may motivate a stance, an act of will, an action. Motivation operates for every type of act, perceptive, evaluative, emotional. I see something beautiful and I feel pleasure at such beauty. All the aspects are involved: perception, recognition, evaluation, stance-taking.

The last aspect to consider is the role of the object. Not the perceiving but the perceived is the factor which truly motivates. It is the beauty that pleases me, not the perception of the beautiful. “*Lightning* turns into my motive for the expectation of thunder, not the *perception* of lightning” (Stein 2000, 43). The (internal) object of the act is the factor that grounds the passage from a given act to the next one.

7. Conclusion

Motivation has a complex structure and we have only scratched its surface. We have seen that both the ego and the object sides of psychological acts play a role in the architecture of motivation. By way of a final summary, the multifaceted articulation of the ego unfolds its own object, which in its turn the object of the act activates the possible ways in which acts follow one another.

Annex A. A Few Words on Values

Emotional acts have proper connections with values, which means that the capacity to perceive and live values is connected to the sphere of emotional acts. Within the context of this paper, I cannot avoid mentioning at least one structural problem, important for a deeper understanding of the structure of the ego. The organization of values, in fact, seems to follow two different principles: that of strength and that of height (Hartmann 2003). These two principles operate in opposite directions: the strongest values are also the least high values, whilst the highest values are the least strong ones. Usually, the lower values, the stronger ones, are also the simplest values; on the other hand, the superior values are the most complex ones.

The criteria of strength and height have consequences which at first sight may seem surprising. The main consequence is this: from an ethical point of view, violating a lower value is more serious than violating a higher value. On the other hand, fulfilling a higher value has greater value than fulfilling a lower value: “sinning against lower values is ignominious, shameful, revolting, but their fulfilment only reaches the level of decency, without rising above it. Offending against higher values, by contrast, does indeed have the character of moral failure, but nothing of the directly degrading, while fulfilment of these values may have something uplifting, liberating, indeed thrilling about it” (Hartmann 2003, p. 53). By way of example: “heroism warrants admiration, but a lack of heroism arouses neither contempt nor indignation”. On the other hand, whilst trustworthiness warrants respect, “a lack of trustworthiness warrants contempt or even indignation” (Hartmann 2003, p. 450).

The ultimate rationale for the principles of strength and height resides in the general nature of the levels of reality. The organization of the strata of reality reflects the law of strength. Although there are conditions which limit the efficacy of the law, it nevertheless performs a crucial role in organizing the strata.

The strata are also subject to a law of freedom whereby the higher level is always free from the lower one. The higher level is defined with respect to a *novum* which distinguishes it from the levels that precede it and function as its bearers. As Hartmann puts it: the strength of the lower structure is only “as building stones, as material” (Hartmann 2003, p. 448 and elsewhere).

The strength of a value indicates the gravity of its violation. The height of a value expresses the

merit deriving from its fulfilment. Offence and merit proceed in parallel but are not identical. Offending against life is a grave offence and has very little merit. More in general, harm to material goods is more serious than harm to spiritual goods (Hartmann 2003, p. 453). But fulfilment of spiritual goods, and ethical goods in particular, is a merit much greater than the merit corresponding to respect for more elementary goods.

Respect for more elementary goods is often the condition for acceding to higher goods. Those who violate lower goods are wicked. But the reverse does not hold: a person who violates higher goods, someone who fails to fulfil them, “is not on that account a bad man; his conduct threatens no one; it merely lacks the higher moral content” (Hartmann 2003, p. 440).

Structuring by levels is important not only because it furnishes us with the tectonic laws governing values, but also because it provides us with criteria to distinguish, at least in most cases, authentic values from bogus ones. If the architecture of values is based on levels of dependence, then the authentic elevation of value is also divided into levels; it develops through intrinsic stages from the lower values to the higher ones. Although the situation may still lack full theoretical analysis, it is well known in practice. A person whose behaviour is oriented to a higher value, but does not simultaneously respect the values that support it, is structurally discordant. The higher values to which s/he refers are not credible. Loving with distrust or giving with cowardice are not authentically virtuous behaviours (Hartmann 2003, p. 456). Values are constructed step by step, proceeding from the most elementary levels upwards.

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